

CHEVY CHASE VILLAGE LOCAL ADVISORY PANEL  
TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

April 15, 2013 -- Board Report

Membership:

Our panel consists of: Gail Feldman, Helene Sacks, Betsy Stephens, Peter Wellington, and Tom Bourke. Two members left our panel this year: Joan Marsh moved from the Village and subsequently passed away. Eph Jacobs retired from our group. We are grateful to both of them for service to our committee. In addition, Eph has served the Village long and well in many areas, including many years on the Board.

Background:

In 1998 the County Council designated the area generally bounded by Cedar Parkway on the west, Grafton Street on the south, Brookville Road on the east, and Bradley Lane on the north as the "Chevy Chase Village Historic District". Building permits for exterior work there are reviewed by the County's Historic Preservation Commission ("HPC"), which meets every two weeks. Our Local Advisory Panel ("LAP") provides community input to the HPC, which is legally required to give "considerable weight" to our recommendations. Therefore, strictly speaking, the LAP is not a Village committee; rather it is an advisory group for the County HPC.

Current Work:

The HPC meets twice per month, and there are almost always one to two items on the agenda for Chevy Chase Village. Thus far in 2013 we have reviewed nine projects, but some have had multiple reviews. Most cases move through without major problems, and many are given expedited consideration and approval. Three examples of difficult cases do come to mind. In one, a major addition was proposed on a large, double lot. After numerous consultations with Staff and the HPC, the design was reduced, set back and agreed by all. The LAP supported it and felt the historic district was better for the process. In another case the resident wanted to cut through an existing stucco porch rail-height wall to create a center lead walk entry. HPC refused this even though we had recommended approval because we felt the proposal was compatible with the historic district and not detrimental to the integrity of the house. In another difficult case, a resident was seeking approval for aluminum-clad replacement windows. Our LAP was somewhat divided on this but eventually tried to broker a compromise allowing the new windows on the sides and rear of the house. HPC rejected all the replacements because they were not consistent with the existing house construction -- especially the proposed use of aluminum cladding, which is discouraged in our Guidelines. The applicant (who unfortunately had purchased the windows already) said they will ask the County Board of Appeals to reverse the HPC's decision. However, in another case the HPC agreed to compatible, wood, replacement windows, and we definitely supported this.

In order to try to reduce the possibility that Village residents may purchase materials or otherwise begin implementing plans without considering the HPC review process, we are undertaking to assist the Village staff in providing information to incoming (and existing) Village residents about that process, as well as the tax benefits available for approved work performed on houses within the historic district. Peter Wellington is the LAP's point person on this mission.

### Our Operating Procedures:

The LAP is on a very tight, bi-weekly schedule. We receive a county staff report and must provide our input within a matter of days; so we review and provide input through an exchange of email. We usually agree within our LAP, but if not, we report our divergent views to the HPC. In the interest of transparency our email is automatically cc'd to the Village for archiving. These emails are available to Village residents for review.

### Philosophy:

Our current members are very mindful that part of our goal is to mitigate a sometimes cumbersome process for the residents. We have generally found that the HPC and the County Staff who prepare the reviews are very professional, but tend toward stricter control. There have been no instances in recent memory where a majority of the LAP felt Staff was too lenient. We also know that the Village Board has traditionally been concerned that the county process may infringe on the judgments and preferences of the residents. Therefore part of serving on the LAP is recognition that we place a high priority on promoting compromise and flexibility.

With these vacancies mentioned earlier, we are very open to new members. We would ask the Board to forward any inquiries or volunteers to us.

In summary, we recognize that there are divergent opinions in the Village of this entire historic review process. Some view it as an unnecessary intrusion by the County, others see it as a positive for quality of life etc, and some view it as an inoculation which stings but prevents a worse disease. We just try to do our best to distill these divergent views into recommendations that will also help make the process fairer, more predictable and less burdensome for our fellow Village residents.

Submitted on behalf of the LAP by it chair:  
Thomas K. Bourke, 36 Quincy St.